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Foreword

Constipation: current and emerging treatments

John M Hutson & Bridget R Southwell

Chronic constipation is a major global health problem affecting millions of people, particularly in the developed world. The extent of the issue for the healthcare system remains enormous, although hard to define precisely because of changes in the criteria for diagnosis, diet and behavior. Although laxative treatments have been available for many years, there are still many patients who develop chronic constipation.

What is chronic constipation and what is its cause? In this book, the changing definitions that encompass the symptoms experienced by patients are highlighted, along with the increasing burden of disease in the elderly and those with dementia, Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis. As constipation is a symptom, the recent advances in etiology are described, along with the development of new diagnostic tools such as manometry and colonic transit study.

It is now accepted that a significant subgroup of patients have an intrinsic motility disturbance of colonic function, known as slow-transit constipation. This knowledge is driving changes in management on the assumption that different causes will need different tailored therapies. Slow-transit constipation is not just an issue for middle-aged women, but has recently been identified in children, suggesting a potentially congenital origin.

Current best practice in management for constipation is elaborated, so that primary care physicians can implement this. As constipation is the end point

of several etiological pathways, and is affected by diet, social customs and behavior, a holistic approach to management is described, along with a new, simple and effective disimpaction regime. There are several new pharmacological approaches to management currently under intense investigation, as well as early promising trials, including prucalopride, lubiprostone and linaclotide.

Despite these advances in medical management, some patients require surgical solutions to their intractable symptoms. The current laparoscopic and open approaches to colectomy are described, along with the increasingly popular use of the appendix or an indwelling catheter in the proximal colon for antegrade colonic enemas. An exciting area of current study is the use of neuromodulation by surgical implantation of electrodes on the sacral nerves, as well as transcutaneous electrical stimulation.

This book brings together all the information that physicians need to provide current best practice in management, as well as highlighting the exciting new areas of research in drugs and neuromodulation that have the potential to significantly improve treatment of chronic constipation. The authors are international experts in their fields and we thank them for their contributions. We trust this book will provide a valuable resource for future students and physicians.

Financial & competing interests disclosure

JM Hutson and BR Southwell hold patents on the method of transcutaneous electrical stimulation to treat constipation. JM Hutson and BR Southwell have received Australian Government National Health and Medical Research (NHMRC) grants to study the effect of transcutaneous electrical stimulation on children with slow-transit constipation and with anorectal retention and to develop an electrical stimulation device specifically to treat constipation. JM Hutson and BR Southwell have received investment from the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund (MRCF) to develop the device and created a start-up company – GI Therapies (Melbourne, Australia) – to develop and test a prototype device. The authors have no other relevant affiliations or financial involvement with any organization or entity with a financial interest in or financial conflict with the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript apart from those disclosed.

No writing assistance was utilized in the production of this manuscript.